

# A New Yavneh Publication

9 Tishrei 5769 // 7 November 2008

## Minyan Times

Friday Mincha	4:30 PM
Kabbalat Shabbat	After Mincha
Saturday Shacharit	8:45 AM
Saturday Mincha	4:20 PM
Saturday Maariv	5:37 PM

## Announcements

- There will be a shiur on the parsha (Lech Lecha) this Friday night, between Maariv and dinner, given by Rabbi Wolkenfeld.
- There will be an oneg Friday night in the room of Zach Glass, 201S Dod. It'll get going when dinner/singing in the CJL wind down.
- This Sunday, at 10 AM, there is a charity 5K race put on by the CJL. It costs \$7 for students and \$15 for community members. After the race there's a free brunch and all proceeds go to Magen David Adam. You can register on the CJL's website or at the day of the race.
- This Sunday, 11:45AM to 12:45PM is the first women only pool hour at Dillon Gym, organized largely by our very own Marli Wang.
- This Monday, November 10th Rabbi Menachem Leibtag will be giving a shiur over dinner at 6PM. Maariv will happen at 5:40PM that day and dinner is free for upperclassmen and grad students. The title of the shiur is "Conversations between God and Man in Sefer Breishit: The Biblical Art of Divine Dialogue" and will be followed by discussion.
- Beginner Talmud Shiur 8PM-9PM Monday night—not too late to join! Advanced Talmud Shiur 7:30PM-8:30PM Tuesday night—not too late to join!
- Lunch-n-learn Wednesday at 12PM (free for upperclassmen and grad students). Rav Kook Tefillah Shiur Wednesday at 6PM (f.u.g.s.)
- Mishmar Thursday 6PM CJL Library

## A Brief Thought

By David Wolkenfeld

In his introduction to *Sefer Bereishit*, the Netziv (R. Naphtali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin—he was the last rosh yeshiva at the great Vollozhon Yeshiva and his commentary on *Humash* called *Ha-Emek Davar* is one of the masterpieces of 19th century Torah commentary), explains why the rabbinic name for *Sefer Bereishit* was "*Sefer Ha-Yashar*," the Book of Morally Upright Behavior. The personalities of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are central to *Bereishit* and our patriarchs were the paradigmatic *yesharim*—individuals of outstanding moral character.

The Netziv goes on to explain the trait of *yashrut* and how it relates to other terms such as *tzidkut* (righteousness) or *hasidut* (piety). *Yashrut*, uniquely refers specifically to interpersonal decency. To illustrate the contrast, the Netziv compares our patriarchs with the generation of the destruction of the Second Temple. The generation of the destruction of the temple were indeed *tzadikim* and *hasidim*, but did not act with *yashrut* viz. their fellow men:

They were *tzadikim* and *hasidim* and toiled in Torah study, but they were not *yashar* in their conduct in the world. Therefore, out of their baseless hatred they suspected one another. Someone whom they saw acting in a way different from their own particular opinion regarding any religious matter was accused of being a heretical Sadducee or Epicurean. And in this way they came to bloodshed through their partisanship and all manner of evil followed until the (second) Temple was destroyed [...] For God is morally upright (*yashar*) and cannot tolerate this sort of "*tzadik*." [...] And this is the great praise of the patriarchs, not only were they *tzadikim* and *hasidim* and lovers of God to the fullest extent possible, they were also *yesharim*. That is to say in their conduct among gentiles, even among worshippers of disgusting idols, they always were among them in a loving way and were concerned for their welfare for the sake of upholding God's creation.

This combination of religious piety and ethical excellence has been passed down through the generations from the time of Abraham unto modern times. In the previous generation, R. Yosef Breuer commented:

“Kosher” is intimately related to “Yoshor.” God’s Torah not only demands the observance of Kashruth and the sanctification of our physical enjoyment; it also insists on the sanctification of our social relationships. This requires the strict application of the tenets of justice and righteousness which avoid even the slightest trace of dishonesty in our business dealings and personal life.

There are three small, but growing, efforts within the Orthodox community to foster a greater sensitivity to interpersonal ethics and promote greater care and conscientiousness in relation to our employment practices and to the employment practices of businesses we support.

In Israel, the grassroots organization B’Ma’aglei Tzedek has inspected and approved several hundred restaurants and catering halls throughout Israel that pay their employees the Israeli minimum wage, social security benefits, and overtime. Leading rabbis of the Religious Zionist movement support their efforts, among them R. Yuval Cherlow, R. Yaakov Ariel, and R. Aharon Lichtenstein. R. Lichtenstein has publicly stated that it is forbidden to patronize a restaurant where employees are not paid fairly or are otherwise abused. The Orthodox rabbinate of Los Angeles is offering certification to local businesses that treat their employees with fairness and justice. Most recently, the Orthodox social-justice education and advocacy group, “Uri L’Tzedek” is in the process of certifying kosher restaurants in the New York area that pay all workers the legal minimum wage, guaranteed overtime pay, and create a work environment free from fear of discrimination or physical danger.

Rashi famously contrasts the piety of Noah—in the context of his generation—with the piety of Abraham. By quoting opinions among Hazal that both praise and critique Noah, Rashi paints a picture of Noah as a truly ambiguous figure. I have heard Rabbi Brovender say that the central failing of Noah was his inability to translate his own virtues into a better world, either through education or through child raising. Abraham, on the other hand, leverages his own strengths to educate others, and is the father of a nation dedicated to preserving his ethical message. This aspect of Abraham is perhaps what is meant by God’s statement, “For I have singled him out, that he may instruct his children and his posterity to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is just and right (Gen. 18:19).”

After Shabbat, consider logging onto the website:

<http://uriltzedek.webnode.com/tav-hayosher/>. Uri L’Tzedek, in order to earn credibility with restaurant owners, is in the process of collecting names of at least 5,000 kosher consumers who are interested in knowing that the restaurants we patronize conduct themselves in the tradition of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

## Obscure Halacha

### How Frum are You?

By Aviv Rosenblatt

Recently my friend Nimrod—may Hashem speedily set him on the path of tshuva—asked me: “How crazy are you guys? Does this Torah of yours really have a rule determining every breath you take?”

So I told him that yes, we even have a very obscure halacha about the right way to put on your shoes. First you put on your right shoe, then the left, but then first lace the left, and only then the right. It’s no joke—it was included in the Shulchan Aruch, and was deemed important enough to occupy almost half a precious amud of the Talmud (Shabbos 61a). I guess we really follow the words of our sages z”l whenever they tell us what’s right and what’s left (Dvarim 17.11; Horayos 4a; but see Yerushalmi Horayos 1 for an opposite position).

“Important? Sounds downright silly and arbitrary to me,” snorted Nimrod.

But there’s a point behind it, I countered. You start, as always, on the right side, the side representing the attribute of mercy (more on this in the Obscure Kaballah column), the side with which the Kohanim used to begin their purificatory rites. For the same reason, before a meal we first wash the right hand.

Why then do we reverse the order and lace the left shoe first? Because tying the shoelaces symbolizes the tying of the tefillin straps on the left hand. An interesting consequence is that a lefty should reverse the order of tying, and tie first the right shoe, just like he puts tefillin on his right arm. That’s the version preserved in the Mishna Brura (2.6), quoting a source that was quoting the Tvuos Shor.

However, the intermediary source seems to have misquoted the Tvuos Shor. He was talking not about a hand-lefty, but rather a foot-lefty. A hand-lefty, on the other hand, should still tie his left shoe first, just like everybody else. Now how do you know you’re a foot-lefty? The foot you raise first when you walk

could reveal it, but only on the soccer field does the difference become meaningful. On professional soccer teams, players are assigned to a position based on their preferred foot. Hebrew has a term for it: *iter raglo*. It also has a word for someone with two left feet—a *kelev*.

Amazingly enough, the connection between laces (formerly made of leather) and tefillin straps is derived from our parsha (14.23): Avraham swears to the King of Sodom that he will not take even a string, even a shoelace from the loot of the defeated kings of the wealthy and decadent Five Towns. The Gemara (Chulin 89a) shows that in the merit of his oath not to take a string or a shoelace—as Rashi explains, so as to distance himself from theft by not enjoying stolen property—Avraham’s descendants merited the mitzvos of tzitzis and tefillin. Avraham wouldn’t touch a gift if there were strings attached the straps and the laces are there to remind us, it seems, of Avraham’s fastidiousness in avoiding even the slightest taint of iniquity.

“Oh come on... what difference could a pair of dirty old shoelaces make?”

A big one... after detailing the three cardinal mitzvos that a person must give up his or her life rather than transgress, the gemara (Sanhedrin 74b) adds that in the time of an evil decree, when Jews are being publicly forced to convert, a Jew must give up his life rather than alter even the way he ties his shoelaces. Nothing for the Jew is *not* ‘a matter of principle’; every detail counts, and can become the touchstone testing our commitment at every moment, in every tiniest matter, to serve Hashem’s will and do the right thing.

There’s also that story Rav Pesach Krohn tells, of how life and death can hang from a slim lace. A young Israeli soldier had apparently just started doing tshuva—as you could too, Nimrod—and learned, of all things, about our obscure halacha, which he straightaway took upon himself as fully binding. One morning on the way to a helicopter drill he realized he had laced his right boot first. He hesitated for a moment, then decided to stop and put his shoes on all over again. His friends were exasperated by him, and the helicopter took off without him—only to crash soon afterwards.

“Great bubbe-maise. But how a person could get so excited about this obscure halacha to actually sit down and retie his shoes, that part I can’t get.”

Well, I’ll give you a mashal. If your neighbor, in the middle of the night, suddenly gets an awful crav-

ing for a cup of tea, I doubt you’ll come running out of your bed to serve him. The truth is, that it’s a question of love. If you really really cared about your friend, you just wouldn’t be able to stay put in bed, knowing that he has a thirst you could so easily relieve. You wouldn’t ask if it’s fair or makes sense, you’d just come running. Just so with Hashem—we know to what an extraordinary degree He loves us and how easy for us to reciprocate that love, by doing His will, even in such paltry moments as tying our shoelaces. Now I call that exciting.

## Want to Write?

Have a good idea for a column? Contact Greg Burnham (gburnham@) if you are interested in writing for this newsletter. We’ll publish most anything relating to Judaism or Judaism at Princeton.